

Opening Statement of the Honorable Fred Upton
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations
Hearing on “Department of Energy Oversight: What is Necessary to Improve
Project Management and Mission Performance?”
July 24, 2013

(As Prepared for Delivery)

As chairman, one of my priorities is to ensure the agencies we oversee are responsive to – and reflective of – our current economic and technological realities. In other words, we want a governing framework based on today’s needs, not the antiquated priorities from decades ago. Today we take a look at plans for a new management structure and other changes at the Department of Energy announced last week by Secretary Moniz. Our question is, will these reforms help transform DOE for the innovation era?

DOE has recently experienced a number of management challenges, particularly with regard to its stewardship of the nuclear weapons programs and nuclear cleanup. These challenges – and the tremendous risks to the public from failure to address them – are not new. During my time as Oversight Subcommittee Chairman 14 years ago, we took a hard look at agency failures in security and project management, pressuring the agency to reform. Some reforms have worked, and some clearly have not taken hold.

The big lesson is that the agency’s safety, security, and contract management problems span administrations and Congresses. From my experience, and as our witnesses will explain, improving DOE’s performance requires long, sustained attention to ensure lasting improvement in agency performance.

Today’s oversight is especially important because of the new leadership of Secretary Moniz. The secretary has been involved in this Department’s management and performance challenges before, from his time as Under Secretary in the late 1990s. From my conversations with him, he understands the challenges at hand. I look forward to the testimony from Deputy Secretary Poneman, who will explain how he and Secretary Moniz want to tackle these challenges and how they will ensure these plans work as intended.

Getting project and mission execution right is vital for this important agency to serve the American public. As our oversight continues, we are also going to have to ask bigger questions in this enduring effort. In 1995, I made similar remarks before the Energy and Power Subcommittee as we examined the future of the DOE. Eighteen years ago, I expressed my concern that portions of the department were built around outdated assumptions of energy scarcity that no longer existed. Even more so today, DOE operates in a world that is vastly different from the bleak energy outlook of the 1970s. It also operates in a world where nuclear commerce takes place in a worldwide competitive marketplace, and where nuclear risks are more dispersed.

We need to start discussing whether the agency is structured and able to adapt to the realities of this nation’s very bright energy picture. DOE has significant responsibilities that will not and should not go away; the agency must be poised to take on new responsibilities that best serve the energy, environmental, and security needs of the nation. But we also must acknowledge that if we were to start from a clean slate, there is no question an Energy Department for this new era of abundance would hardly resemble the Department of today. This committee’s job will be to ensure the department is managed to meet these responsibilities and structured to ensure they are executed in the best interest of the American taxpayer. This hearing is an initial step in this important work.

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